Generative artificial intelligence and ELT

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There is undoubtedly, and understandably, a growing interest in incorporating generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) technologies into ELT. While advanced AI models have the potential to support language education, offering new tools and resources to enhance learning, their use also raises important questions regarding ethics and responsibility. As we follow the emergence of GenAI as another ELT tool, it is crucial to strike a balance between leveraging the benefits of these technologies and maintaining the core values of effective pedagogy. Educators must develop clear guidelines and best practices for the responsible integration of AI in the classroom, ensuring that it enhances rather than replaces human interaction and critical thinking. In this Special Issue on GenAI and ELT we explore some of the applications, their potential, and the challenges of incorporating GenAI in ELT.

Key words: *Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI)*, *ELT*, *Special Issue*, *technology*, *critical thinking*

Introduction

The past 100–150 years have been marked by more rapid advances in new technologies than ever before in history. And at some point during this timeframe, the now well-known educational aphorism also emerged: 'Technology won't replace teachers, but teachers who use technology will replace those who don't.' Nowadays, it's 'generative artificial intelligence' (GenAI) that's claiming the title of latest and greatest new technology. It is suddenly everywhere, impacting everyday life both in and out of classrooms, for language teachers and learners as well as for other subjects. It's natural to wonder how it will impact our lives and our work over the coming years. GenAI might not replace teachers, but will teachers using it replace those who don't?

The pace of advancement in GenAI has been absolutely incredible. It could be argued that this exacerbates a tension which has always existed to some

extent: that between the typical speed of academic output versus the typical speed of technological developments. As educators, we may well want to include technology in our classroom practice, but we also want this practice to be judicious, to be informed by research and reflection, and these things take time. In the case of GenAI, it seems the gap in the time it takes for the tech to advance and the time it takes for us to study it and share our learnings has become wider than ever.

In this Special Issue, a number of authors have risen to the challenge of attempting to narrow this gap. They cover a range of key issues for ELT practitioners and students that have arisen from the advent and rapid advance of GenAI. But more importantly, these writers' arguments are rooted in a sound foundation of longer-established pedagogic tradition and critical analysis, thus leaving the door open for technology to continue evolving without immediately rendering outdated or naive the experiences and arguments recounted in this issue.

Adoption of GenAI in ELT to date

The field of ELT has always been propelled forward by innovative teachers, and the public release of OpenAI's generative AI chatbot, ChatGPT, in November 2022 was received with a similar zeal for exploring its potential in the language classroom. As early as December 2022, TESOL International Association published a blogpost (Warner 2022) on the benefits of using ChatGPT in teaching. The author mentions speaking and writing assistance as well as reading assistance in the form of grading texts to higher or lower levels, and already at this point highlights the growing importance of emphasizing critical thinking in lessons. He also expresses the hope that if teachers can help students learn to work *with* ChatGPT instead of making it work *for* them, then the future is not as bleak as some might have prophesied at the beginning.

Almost two years later and teacher views still vary along a wide spectrum. Some teachers fear that GenAI tools will eliminate their jobs or will make it meaningless, but there is a growing tendency among ELT professionals who believe that joint work, i.e. combining human and artificial intelligence, is going to be the future of language teaching (Edmett *et al.* 2023). The irreplaceable 'human touch' is stressed in most studies that include interviews with teachers, showing the belief that certain teacher qualities revolving around emotional intelligence and cultural background knowledge can make human teachers unique (Al-khresheh 2024; Novawan, Walker, and Ikeda 2024).

If we take a deeper look at what GenAI can currently offer teachers and learners, there is almost no end to the list. The various ways GenAI tools can be used include both learner support (helping learners become more autonomous; inclusive and accessible content meeting individual needs) and teacher support (lesson design, content creation, test creation, assistance with feedback and evaluation). Advocates of GenAI tools will point out that certain tasks can be streamlined, such as providing feedback on writing assignments, generating lesson plans, simplifying texts, performing translations, and creating assessment tasks and critical thinking tasks (Van den Berg and Du Plessis 2023). By automating these processes, teachers can free up valuable time to focus on more personalized instruction and student support. Additionally, AI-powered

Alessia et al

language learning platforms can offer customized learning paths and adaptive exercises tailored to individual student needs.

On the other hand, overreliance on AI-generated content may compromise the integrity of the learning process (Warschauer and Xu 2024). There are concerns about the accuracy and reliability of information produced by AI models, as well as the potential for students to become overly dependent on these technologies. Moreover, the use of AI in education raises questions about academic honesty and the authenticity of student work. Despite the advancements, there are still issues of, for instance, hallucinations (where a GenAI model generates content that is nonsensical or incorrect for no apparent reason) and issues with copyright infringements, and biased or inappropriate outputs. The implication of this is that human supervision is always advised.

Contribution of this Special Issue to the field of ELT

The key lesson arising from this Special Issue is that—arguably like all other new technologies to date—the success of integrating GenAI into ELT seems to depend largely on the success of developing tech literacy and awareness among teachers and learners. The technology in and of itself does have some unique characteristics and risks, but through deliberate reflection in and on practice, teachers and learners can benefit from the affordances of GenAI where appropriate; and this need not detract from the use and value of other approaches and tools with which we are more familiar and which have already stood the test of time, such as inductive approaches to teaching grammar or the use of presentation software in academic and business English contexts.

In this Special Issue, we see how conventional and widespread ELT methods and practices could incorporate new GenAI technology, such as collaborative approaches to developing writing skills (Yoo-Jean Lee, this issue), the production of language test items (Shin and Lee, this issue), and the teaching and learning of pronunciation (Mompean, this issue). We also see that problematic and all-too-human behaviour and attitudes can persist if unexamined and unquestioned—issues that new technologies may not introduce but may nonetheless encourage or facilitate, such as the age-old problem of cheating (De Wilde, this issue) as well as the more modern ignorance of the role of English as a dynamic global lingua franca rather than a fixed subject to be learnt with a single correct model to adhere to (Jeon, Lee, and Coronel-Molina, this issue). The pros and cons of GenAI in ELT are also debated in a discussion piece, where the advantages of GenAI are viewed against its challenges and risks (Szabó and Szoke, this issue). And as with any new approach or technology, teachers cannot simply be handed something from above without any support or training. With GenAI, as with all other new tech, teachers need time to try and to reflect on its potential benefits and risks, in both preservice training (Moorhouse *et al.*, this issue) and for experienced in-service teachers (Haldun Kaya, this issue).

Given the technological focus of this Special Issue, we have also included two Technology for the Language Teacher features. The first is a comprehensive introduction to GenAI in ELT, from explaining the different kinds to how it can be utilized in ELT and the issues to consider when integrating GenAI in our practice (Moorhouse, this issue). And there is

not only new tech. Machine translation, for instance, has been around for decades, helping to bridge language barriers with varying degrees of success. However, the latest advancements incorporate GenAI, significantly enhancing the capabilities of the new machine translation tools which can now generate more accurate and contextually appropriate translations, making them powerful aids in ELT (Kirchhoff, this issue).

Finally, before we dive into the main content of this Special Issue, it is important to remind ourselves that 'GenAI' does not equal 'ChatGPT'. GenAI is a wider term that includes the ability of various software to generate unique and new responses (Martineau 2024). These responses can be textual, visual, or auditory. ChatGPT is just one type of GenAI chatbot, which lets users communicate with it and ask for responses in natural human language. However, there are other chatbots available, some of which can also generate images on the same platform. Additionally, more and more websites that have been quite popular among language teachers for years, such as Quizlet, Quizizz, Edpuzzle, or Mentimeter, are introducing AI features to make their work easier. Students can also come across AI plugins in most services they use for homework, for instance, Google Docs, Grammarly, QuillBot, or Microsoft Office.

All this means that GenAI features are becoming such an integral part of our daily work that, realistically, it is likely to become increasingly difficult to work *without* them. The question of whether we actually want to or should work without them is a conceptual one that tends to be decided by individual teachers until a common AI policy is developed by their schools. (We leave open for now the major question of whether such policies are indeed developed, or even considered necessary, by many schools.) We invite you to reflect on the experiences and arguments shared here and make up your own mind—at least for the time being—on the question we posed at the start of this introduction: GenAI might not replace teachers, but will teachers using it replace those who don't?

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Acknowledgements

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